

# Workshop Report and Recommendations: Migrant Issues and Cordillera Concerns

By Cesar T. Taguba

## Group members

- Peter Agnaonao
- Henry Foken
- Marjorie Lev
- Julio Monico
- Henry Pit-og
- Joan Ricaroz
- Dominga Webber
- Cesar T. Taguba (facilitator)

## I. Migrant Issues:

The discussion on the Migrant issues started with the sharing of significant data and trends, which are: a) increasing number of Filipinos leaving home and family to work abroad as a matter of survival. It is estimated that around 3,000 queue in foreign embassies in Manila to employment abroad. b) In Europe the overall policy is to “restrict entry, integrate a few, deport as many.” The undocumented are being criminalized. The rise of anti-migrant/foreign political parties is alarming. On the other hand, there are migrant and refugee advocates. It is best for migrants to organize themselves to protect and advance their rights and welfare.

### Recommendations:

1. Support the campaign for the regularization of the undocumented who are the most vulnerable among our compatriots abroad. The regularization comes in the form of amnesty which was implemented in labor-receiving countries like Italy, Spain, Belgium, Greece.
2. Call on the Philippine government to adopt measures to implement the UN Convention on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, which it ratified. The Convention came *en force* in 2003 upon its ratification by 20 UN members-states.
3. Call on the CAR (Cordillera Administrative Region) and the provincial officials in the Cordillera to create a **Commission on Migrant Workers and Their Families** to protect and advance migrant rights and welfare and to provide channels for them to participate in the genuine development of the Cordillera.

(Note: During the Cultural evening, the undersigned informed Ambassador about this resolution. She volunteered to endorse and forward the resolution to the CAR and provincial governors. Below is a draft of the resolution).

4. Call on the government to exercise more strictly its control and supervision over recruitment agencies. Since recruitment was privatized, several unscrupulous recruitment agencies victimized hundreds of migrants.

## II. Cordillera Concerns

The discussion stated with sharing on significant developments in the Cordillera, foremost of which is the opening up of the entire Cordillera region for foreign mining exploration and exploitation. Already, three fourth of the Cordillera are allocated to foreign transnational mining corporations (TNMCs). The impact of mining on the livelihood and health of the people and the people’s response to “development aggression” were shared. Peter shared what the Cordillera-Belgium and the solidarity group are doing to raise awareness about the negative impact of TNMC operations.

### Recommendations:

1. Conduct widespread information on the impact of the 1995 Mining Act and the operations of TNMCs on the livelihood, environment, culture and right to self-determination of the Cordillera people.
2. Support the continuing process of seeking out viable alternative(s) to TNMC mining.
3. Help establish solidarity linkages between indigenous people advocates and ecology organizations with their counterparts in the Cordillera.

4. Support campaigns of the Cordillera people, such as:
  - a) Campaign Against TNMC operations
  - b) Campaign to Repeal the 1955 Mining Act
  - c) Campaign to Save the Abra River from further pollution by TNMC, particularly the Lepanto Mining Corporation
  - d) Campaign to Settle Tribal Conflicts peacefully and to Promote Unity among the Tribes/Clans

(Note: Power Point presentation on the TNMC impact on the Cordillera people was not shown due to technical problem but is available upon request from the facilitator/reporter)



## **Aging Migrants**

*by Albert S. Bacdayan*

The 3rd ICBE Consultation in Switzerland was among the more interesting affairs I had attended lately. One reason for this was the workshop on aging migrants. Being myself an already aged and still aging migrant, I joined the group because it had personal relevance to me. I came out of the workshop convinced that it is a good thing that this topic of aging is being addressed by Igorots abroad at this time because it sensitizes us about this basic given in human existence that should help us prepare for the inevitable -- old age and retirement. Assuring comfort, dignity and security in old age and retirement is a challenge for everyone and should be everyone's project for himself or herself. This is especially true in the case of Igorot immigrants.

The facts for us Igorots in the matter of migration are that immigration overseas is a new phenomenon, being basically a post-1965 occurrence; the immigrants are generally young, many of whom are skilled so that they earn decent incomes; and, it is probably the case that most are eager to help family back home from the goodness of their hearts if not from the pressure of family obligation or of Igorot values to help one another. There is also so much economic expectation of the immigrant on the part of kith and kin or family and relatives. Often times, these expectations are overblown and unrealistic. One last fact for our present discussion: the immigrant is often culturally loyal, meaning that he or she is cognizant of the values back home and is therefore vulnerable to the pressures emanating from that direction especially in the case of such life crises as death in the family.

Given these circumstances, what is the Igorot immigrant to do to ensure a secure and comfortable retirement in old age in the place of her or his choice or preference? Although the workshop was not particularly framed this way, the workshop revolved around this issue or question, to the best of my recollection.

Two cases or situations put on the table greatly shaped and sharpened the frame of discussion stimulating the flow of the proceedings. The first case was of a lady who spent so much of her hard-earned means to support members of her family back home and that she had ended up empty-handed when she retired, needing their help in turn because they did not recompense. They were not there for her, so to speak, when she needed them after all her sacrifices in their favor. In the end it was financially more secure for her to retire abroad, I believe in the UK, due to the social programs including housing and medical care that she is entitled to there. The downside however, is that she faced loneliness and isolation being away in her old age from people she knows and is comfortable with. The other case was that of the death of the husband in an immigrant family whose body was brought home to the Philippines at the insistence of his family there, especially that of an aunt, at prohibitive expense on the part of his widow. Both cases are culturally-based in that what brought them about are cultural values. Igorots fear and eschew cremation and value highly being able to see the actual body of loved ones who die beyond the home territory. This way they are able to express their grief and say their traditional goodbyes in the imagined but realistic fashion, albeit to a dead person, thereby arriving at definitive closure in a relationship. Igorots also

value highly the idea of members of the family helping each other in a mutual way assuring strength and survival of the family group. Laudable as these and many homegrown values are, they can conspire to put the modern Igorot who move away from the homeland, including that of the aging migrant Igorot, on the horns of a dilemma as the two cases seem to indicate.

The spirit or sense of the workshop did not reject or even decry these values as making things unduly hard for the aging migrant. Rather, it is my sense that it groped for an accommodationist way to deal with culturally-engendered situations. Thus, the summation of the often animated conversation and exchange of ideas emphasized the importance of education in the issues of aging as specifically framed by the two situations already mentioned. I quote four discrete ideas noted by the secretary of the workshop whose name I apologize that I do not know: “educate young generation to save for themselves”, “prepare yourself financially”, “writing about will and testament” and under this item “cremation” Others may give these a different interpretation but it seems to me that what the workshop said is that the values concerned in the situations are fine but the migrant should take other measures to help himself or herself toward a secure old age and retirement. He or she may share his/her substance with relatives but at the same time keep some for herself or himself, should be financially prepared to go it alone in retired life whether home in the Philippines in the village or in the city or else abroad, should have a last will and testament and should be self-informed about and consider cremation as a means of final disposition after death. By these means the aging migrant ensures his capability to live independently and in dignity and to minimize problems for his family, especially those of transporting his body should he die abroad. (Incidentally, I feel that Igorots will accept cremation one of these days as an alternative way of dealing with those who die far away to the benefit of all.) Perhaps the workshop should have also said something about considering burial abroad.

A final point must be reported: the workshop explored the thought that with aging migrants deciding to retire abroad as appears to be the case with the lady in the situation at issue, the Igorot community in the area must commit to help the retirees by providing them social and moral support through regular visitation, rain or shine, to socialize and find out generally how they are coming along and to check on their needs. The Igorot community, in this fashion, becomes the surrogate family of the Igorot retirees. Nothing could be a better expression of Igorot compassion for each other and of Igorot solidarity.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I am glad I joined the workshop. I enjoyed the conversation and exchange of ideas between the members of the group which included Conchita Pooten as the chairperson, Ruth Licay, Teresa Bangsoy, Bibiana Lee, Virginia Czesak, Patrick Bounggick, Kathryn Tadawan, Helen Banban, Julian Banban and myself. I came to realize, writing this report, what a thought-provoking experience it was and what a potentially beneficial activity to do another workshop on the topic. I, therefore, recommend further discussion of aging migrants and retirement in future consultations. We will be helping ourselves if we do so. It is a truly new emerging reality looming before us and the more we explore the subject and its ramifications or issues and explore strategies for dealing with them, the better-off we will be.



## **Retirement in the Philippines**

*By Cristabel Olat Bounggick*

### **Group members**

- Rosemarie Madasec (Reporter)
- Martin Koller
- Clarita Koller-Alegre
- Caridad Fiar-od
- Angie Wunderle
- Fely Bongalos
- Evangeline Pit-og-Abeya
- Susan Nana Atakora

### Objective of the Workshop:

The objective of the workshop is for the BIMAAK-Europe to make proposal on the issue on retirement after listening to the retirement scenario in the Philippines and after listening to each one's re-entry plan after retirement.

### Scenario:

A government employee in the Philippines is forced to retire at age 65 or go for optional retirement at age 60. Upon retirement, one avails of a retirement program with monthly pay or lump sum or the 'take-all' scheme. The 'take-all' lump sum, on the average, ranges from 400.00,00 Philippine Peso which is about 6.000,00 Euros among janitors or clerks to 2 Million Pesos or about 28.000,00 Euros among highly paid professionals. For those who go for lump sum, the most prevailing use of their money, wise or unwise, as influenced by the Igorot culture are the following: (Results of Survey)

- To finance application of children/grandchildren to seek employment abroad.
- To earn interest by lending to private individuals, who in most cases abuse them or even cheat them.
- To buy a farm in Pangasinan, Isabela or Palawan then they migrate to work in the farm.
- To improve their house or buy a vehicle for their child's service or to earn a living.
- To save it in the bank to be spent for Igorot rituals when they die.
- To be given to their favorite child/children to manage its use and expect to live with them until they die.
- To pay their debts, which resulted from accumulation due to the educational and other financial demands of their children bringing them back to square one where they are having not enough to spend.

Looking at this scenario we are posed with the following questions:

How about us migrants in Europe, shall we go back to the Philippines when we retire?

Considering the other culture integrated to the Igorot culture, how shall we address issues about retirement? As an organization, what could be an adaptable re-entry plan for the retirees?

In answer to the first question, most of the migrant members agreed to retire in the Philippines considering the purchasing power of their retirement benefits compared to one retired from Philippine employment. In answer to the last two questions, the group proposed the conceptualization of an association, which is a legitimate body duly registered, for overseas Filipino workers and their spouses to ensure the protection of these retirees. In addition to the function of this association, is to make advocacies on legal migration, educate the youth and to correct what the powerful politicians are doing.



## **Second Generation Igorots**

*By Jane Gavino*

### **Group members**

- |                          |                     |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| – Jane Gavino (reporter) | – Sarah Passerini   |
| – Ric Cuyob              | – Natasha Passerini |
| – Judith Balangyao       | – Luz Tuazon        |
| – Ingerith Pooten        | – Frederick Baldo   |

## Objective of the Workshop:

How to motivate/ encourage Igorot youth to participate in Igorot consultations

It was noticed that during this consultation there was only a few 2nd generation participants. Thus our group came up with the following recommendations/suggestions that might help in attracting 2nd generation participants.

1. Activities designed for the younger Igorots, i.e. games, outings, workshops on how to play traditional instruments, how to use Igorot tools such as *liga-o*, *lusong* (*pagbayua-an*) etc.
2. To contact leaders of each country and try to get the members or names of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Igorots in each organization
3. A youth journal/publication email group to be started
4. [www.baguiocityonline.com](http://www.baguiocityonline.com)- website that caters to Igorot people from around the world.
5. For parents, these are:
  - a. educate their children on our values, beliefs and traditions
  - b. encourage them to participate on meetings like this
  - c. try and bring their children home as often as they could
  - d. teach their children how to prepare/cook our own delicacies like *patopat*, *bukel* with *etag* and etc.
6. Link with an Igorot Youth Organization in the Philippines



## **Stories of our Igorot Culture**

*By Airen Kalley*

The workshop was facilitated by Yvonne and participated in by the following persons:

- |                   |                     |             |
|-------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| - Beth Ut-utan    | - Rebecca Riesterer |             |
| - Teofila Hofer   | - Lolit Hafner      |             |
| - Cecille Cobcobo | - Rick Kilongan     |             |
| - Fely Bongalos   | - Violeta Passerini |             |
| - Sabina Kuenzi   | - Julio Monico      |             |
| - Bart Aliten     | - Walter Labaya     |             |
| - Julius Banban   | - Airen Kalley      | reporter    |
| - Rhino Oblas     | - Yvonne Belen      | facilitator |

The workshop aimed to collect stories of our Igorot Culture especially our experiences and to suggest ways in which we could publish our stories.

The participants of the workshop suggested that the stories to be published would include Igorot practices on Birth, Child Rearing (Growth), Sickness, Marriage and Daily Life Practices. It would also include relationships of man to nature and relationship of Christianity and our Igorot Beliefs.

Experiences of participants on "Ab-abiiik," speaking to Spirits and "Sapsapo" were recounted during the workshop. There are a lot more experiences and stories about our Igorot Culture and our way of life which needed to be documented and handed down to our next generation. The facilitator however suggested that "sapsapo" will be excluded.

The participants of the workshop agreed that the stories to be published will be written by Igorots who had direct experiences or are witnesses to Igorot practices. These will be centralized to manang Yvonne Belen ([tokwifivonne@yahoo.com](mailto:tokwifivonne@yahoo.com)). It was also suggested that BIBAK Switzerland will be the publisher should they approve it.

Suggestions on the name of the publication were: "Isistorya," "Kaistoryaan di Kaigorotan," and "Kaigorotan."